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Convention on the
Rights of the Child

GENERAL

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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES
UNDER ARTICLE 44 OF THE CONVENTION

Initial reports of States parties due in 1993

Addendum

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[6 July 1994]

MALDIVES

1. This report is submitted in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to which the Maldives is a party, and it contains a brief overview of the activities carried out by way of implementing the said Convention in the Maldives.

2. Since the Maldives is an Islamic nation of long standing, and in keeping with the Islamic tradition of ensuring sound upbringing of children, the welfare of children has always been a priority in the country. It also was among the very first countries to ratify the historic United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The practical activities that were undertaken in the country in the aftermath were a clear manifestation of the Maldives' commitment to the Convention, and to children.

3. The Government of the Maldives, under the leadership of His Excellency President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, is committed to fulfil the needs of children, to safeguard their basic human rights; to ensure their right to enjoy the benefits of social and economic progress of the society and to guarantee a

safe environment for them as emphasized by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the decisions of the successive South Asian Association for Region Cooperation (SAARC) summit meetings (1986-1991).

4. The fact that almost 50 per cent of the Maldivian population is comprised of children under 16 years of age urges us to promote the total well-being of children. It is to this end that the activities specified in the Convention are being implemented.

5. The first such activity was declaring 1991 as the Year of the Maldivian Child. The activities to commemorate the year were organized by a ministerial coordination committee appointed by the President. One of the significant events of the year was the National Conference on the Maldivian Child held in Male, the capital of the Maldives, from 8-11 July 1991, which was inaugurated by the President. In his inaugural address, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom reaffirmed the high priority accorded to children by the Government in all aspects of their development. "For children are indeed the most precious asset of a nation, the hope of its future. Yet it must not escape our mind that children are also the most vulnerable segment of the society. It is essential, therefore, that in the life of a nation, the welfare of its children take precedence over all other issues", said the President. He further stated that caring for children is, no doubt, the best investment for the future. He also expressed his appreciation to the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. James P. Grant, for his deep commitment to the cause of children all over the world.

6. The Conference highlighted the situation of the Maldivian children, and formulated effective measures to achieve the well-being of the children in respect of the recommendations and global strategies adopted by the World Summit for Children held at United Nations Headquarters on 30 September 1990. In this regard, it adopted the Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of the Maldivian Child. Subsequently, the National Programme of Action (NPA) for achieving the goals of the 1990s for children and development was prepared by the Inter-Ministerial Coordinating Committee consisting of representatives of the Ministries of Health and Welfare, Education, Atolls Administration, and Planning and Environment.

7. The NPA is based on the consensus reached at the National Conference on the Maldivian Child and, undoubtedly, reflects the commitment made by the Government of the Maldives towards the implementation of the Convention.

8. Following the ratification of the Convention, the Government of the Maldives decided to enact a law for the protection of the rights of the child. The first draft of the law was prepared by the Inter-Ministerial Coordinating Committee. The draft was discussed by the Cabinet, and subsequently sent to the Citizens' Majlis on 6 June 1991 and passed on 24 November 1991. The President promulgated the law on 2 December 1991.

9. The Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child consists of three chapters comprising 28 clauses which set out clearly the responsibility of the Government, the parents, and the society in promoting and improving the total well-being of the child. The law obligates all parties concerned to ensure

that Maldivian children are instilled with Islamic values and to make them self-reliant citizens profitable to the nation. It is also the responsibility of the parties concerned to ensure that children are properly disciplined and grow into healthy and productive people. Hence, there is a strong moral duty in observing the law.

10. As a follow up to the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child, a National Council for the Protection of the Rights of the Child was formed by the President under the Ministry of Home Affairs and Sports headed by the Minister of Home Affairs and Sports as Chairman. The National Council is composed of 15 members from 12 different bodies, which include the Ministries of Health and Welfare, Education, Justice, Atolls Administration, Planning and Environment, Defence and National Security, Home Affairs and Sports. Also included are the Department of Women's Affairs, the Department of Religious Affairs, the Attorney General's Office, the Citizens' Majlis and the Government broadcasting agency.

11. The central mandate of the Council is to observe the role played by the Government, the parents and the society regarding the survival, protection and development of the Maldivian child as outlined in the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child. The Council is also entrusted to deal with reported cases regarding the difficulties and problems faced by children and the violation of their rights.

12. The monitoring of the goals of the 1990s aimed at children's development set forth in the NPA is also a responsibility of the Council. The establishment of a central database to monitor the goals is currently under way with the collaboration of the respective parties.

13. Furthermore, a special unit for the rights of the child (URC) was established at the Ministry of Home Affairs and Sports on 1 November 1992. This was seen as the major outcome of the recent efforts made to improve the welfare of children. The Unit deals with cases relating to neglected children and child abuse and takes appropriate measures to resolve such problems in consultation with the Council for the Protection of the Rights of the Child. The URC also provides counselling and guidance services to the misbehaving and troubled children on the request of their parents. This service is being offered with the help of one part-time counsellor and two volunteer counsellors.

14. The URC also deals with juvenile delinquency cases reported to the police. According to the new legislation, those children under the age of 16 cannot be prosecuted under the adult law. As a result, juvenile offenders are normally referred to the URC for counselling and subsequent appropriate action. The increasing number of cases reported to the URC is suggestive of the fact that children face many problems that warrant urgent attention. Moreover, the public is becoming more aware of the existence of a body with a mandate to take corrective action to protect and care for children's rights.

15. An analysis of more than 100 cases so far reported to the URC suggests that the underlying causes of child-related problems are associated with social issues such as broken families.

16. The URC experiences some difficulties in reforming children who misbehave due to the lack of experienced and qualified instructors to deal with the reported cases. Previously, those over the age of 15, in general, were subjected to adult laws. However, the new legislation terms those under the age of 16 as children and provides for special consideration in the prosecution of juvenile offenders.